

Jo's story

I would like to start my story on a positive note. There are times in the past 20 months, since my son was born, that I thought I would never have another baby and some days smiling was a difficult thing to do. With the help of my family and my counselor I am now enjoying my son and coming to terms with my experience. We are now hoping for another pregnancy. I smile again and am often found laughing, I now believe that while I will never forget I will come to terms with it and one day perhaps be able to think about my experience without crying.

It all started in the early hours of Monday morning when my waters broke. With great excitement and hope we rushed to the hospital. Unfortunately I was not in labour and went home (my choice) to await the onset of labour. I was booked for an induction that evening. We arrived in the evening and after having a long discussion with an obstetrician we, and I reiterate it was us, decided to go home and see if things started happening naturally and would come in the following evening for induction. We were phoned the next morning and asked to return for a CTG trace, which we did. Tom was a little distressed at this stage but certainly nothing very bad and we stayed for monitoring. By the time evening came he was more distressed and it was decided and for the first time we were discluded from the discussion that we would just have syntocin but not the prostin as Tom was too distressed at this point. I remember that my cervix was not effaced never mind dilated and we asked if this was going to work or whether we should have c-section at this stage. The answer was a shrug of the shoulders. I had 4 hours of syntocin. It was my choice to not have an epidural and would have to confess that that part of my care was brilliant and when I did ask for an epidural it was in within 30 minutes of asking. By this time I was having just one single uterine contraction that was fairly continuous so it was elected that we would turn off the syntocin as I was at risk of uterine rupture. My cervix was not dilated at all at this point. Everything was turned off and my husband was told to go to sleep. Meanwhile my son was becoming more distressed and my husband became angry and asked to speak to the obstetrician again at this point it was decided that I would need an emergency C-section. I signed the forms and off we went.

In theatres I was left on my back for 20 minutes approx 10 of them with no clothes on my bottom half. I had not been able to lie on back for 5 months without feeling very unwell. It was also in a theatre that my husband had colleagues working in so I was lying naked with people I had met socially around the theatre. Tom was unmonitored and it took a while to get the epidural level correct. Thankfully from now on I could not see because of the green curtain but I could hear everything. The section was difficult as 1 10lb baby with a head on the 99th centile he was not easy to get out and required forceps. When they finally got him out the staff in the theatre were absolutely silent - you could have heard a pin drop and all I could hear was the oxygen mask being used to resuscitate Tom. I now know that he was navy in colour and had an APGAR of 1 and that was for a heart rate of only 63 bpm. I turned to my husband who was crying and asked if he was dead. He

couldn't answer because he did not know. After what seemed like an hour but in fact was 12 minutes we finally heard a cry. Tom was then whisked off to SCUBU.

My husband went with Tom and I was put in a room on my own with no way of contacting anyone and legs that were numb from the epidural. I felt particularly unsafe. I was unsure even what sex my baby was at this stage nobody came to talk to me. I certainly did not find out his birth weight and the time he was born until we were able to obtain my maternity notes 18 months later. Eventually 6 hours later I was put on the antenatal ward – it was 9 am and I had not been washed I was in a lot of pain as the epidural was wearing off but most of all I did not have a baby and was surrounded by pregnant women. I asked to go to SCBU which was considered a bad idea by the midwives, still I went as I felt I would not have been able to recognize my own baby. My Mum had to help me change including my pad and my husband had to take me down there. It was the most painful, physically and mentally, experience of my life. Nobody helped me with breast feeding and yet he was not allowed to leave SCBU until he was feeding properly.

Later that day I was put in a side room and with the exception of drug rounds that was the last time I was spoken to. Nobody thought to ask if I was coping physically never mind emotionally. I managed to retrieve my son from SCBU after having a tantrum, spotted by a consultant down there who very kindly sent my son straight back to me as there was no need for him to have still been on SCBU for the past 24 hrs. Thank you to him. For four days nobody spoke to me until on Sunday we took Tom home. To be honest I would have gone whether they let me or not.

The worst thing is, apart from the trauma we went through, my husband and I are both Doctors and we came to realize that people did not appear to care. We were let down by our own profession, one which I had staunchly supported, despite some media portrayal in the past.

We were robbed of the joy of bringing a child into the world and felt indescribable guilt that we should have prevented it in some way as we understood what was going on. My son was so precious I did not want to put him down and when he was asleep always assumed that he was dead and would run in constantly to check on him.

I feel like a different person now and I will never forget. We are lucky he is completely developmentally normal. I just wish someone had had the decency to talk it through with us after his birth and maybe it would not have gone on for so long because it is not over yet. However I don't cry nearly as much now, I think about it less and am only a tearful not sobbing when I am writing this. I can see a future again and am enjoying my son for all the reasons that I couldn't in his first year of life.

It gets better and easier every day.